

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS): A Global Challenge in the New Millennium

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A World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was first proposed by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), a United Nations (UN) body, in 1998. The summit was formally endorsed by the UN General Assembly in December 2001. A series of regional planning meetings were held in 2002 and 2003 in several countries around the world. A “Preparatory Committee” process (PrepCom) began in July 2002 with an inaugural meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. Unlike many other UN summit processes, WSIS was planned in two

phases. The first phase was held in Geneva 10–12 December 2003 and the second phase held in Tunis 16–18 November 2005. The perspectives of the global library, museum and archive communities are discussed along with summit purposes, outcomes, unresolved issues (Internet governance and funding mechanisms) and a look at the implementation of the Plan of Action by governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector in the coming years.

WSIS origins and timeline

Unlike many other UN summit processes, UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 (21 December 2001) endorsed holding the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in two phases rather than the traditional one. The first phase took place in Geneva from 10–12 December 2003 and the second phase took place in Tunis, from 16–18 November 2005. For a complete history of the U.N. resolutions, see the International Telecommunications Union Web site (Figure 1) listing (ITU Resolutions 2006).

Geneva phase: 10–12 December 2003

The objective of the first phase of WSIS was to develop and to foster a clear statement of political will and to take concrete steps to establish the foundations for an Information Society for all, reflecting all the different interests at stake.

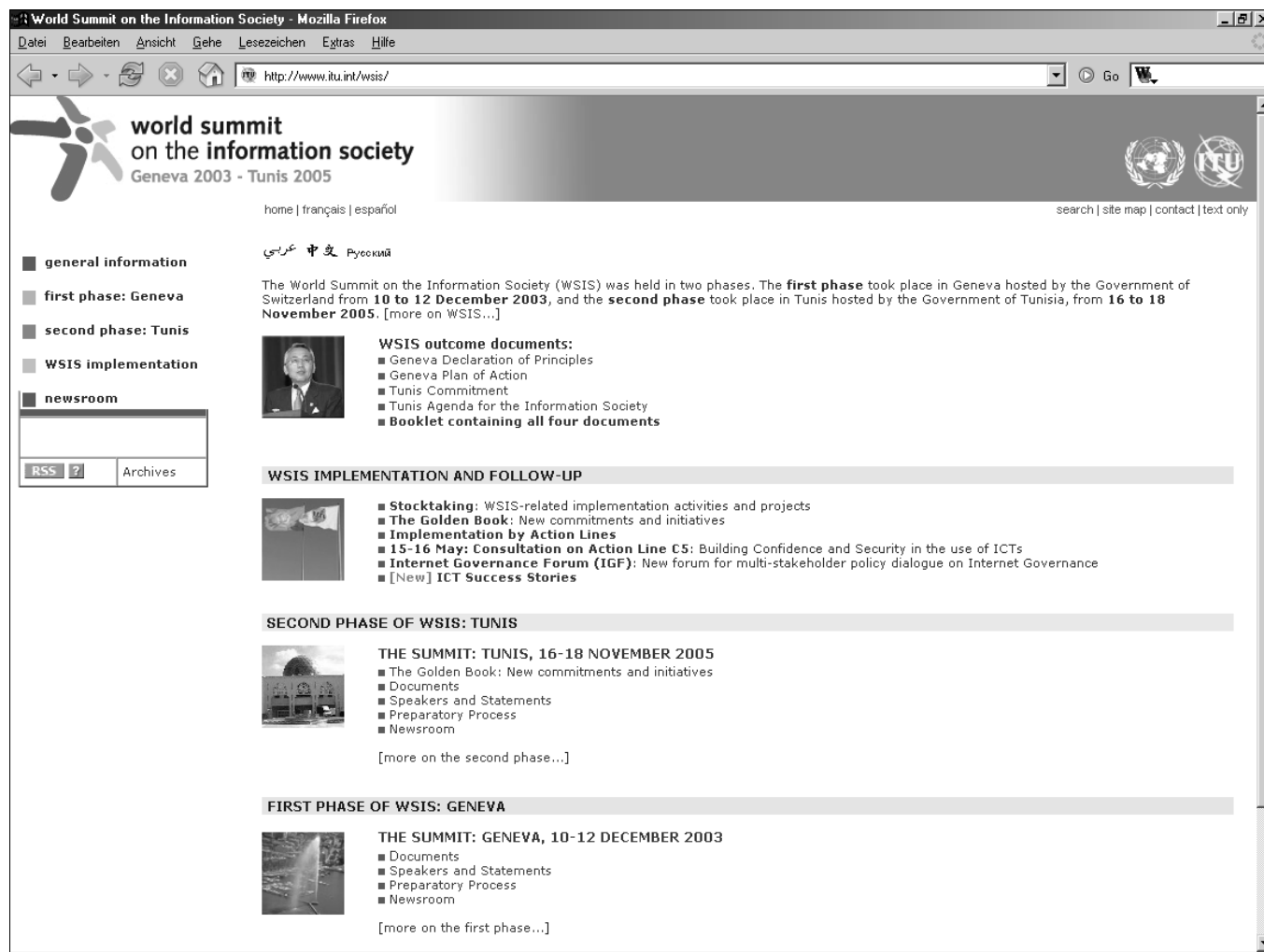
The ITU’s vision for the summit centered on global network connectivity, Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) and, less formally, “boxes and wires.” However, with the active participation of UNESCO beginning in 2001, the WSIS process broadened its agenda to include a wide range of technological and cultural issues and also took on the often contentious issue of human rights.

The Geneva phase was expected to attract about 6,000 participants, but in the end, more than 11,000 participants attended including:

- Government representatives from 175 UN member states
- 50 Heads of States and Governments and Vice-Presidents
- 3,300 representatives from civil society
- 514 business representatives from 98 organizations
- 87 international organizations
- 1,000 media representatives

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Figure 1. Web site for the World Summit on the Information Society developed by the International Telecommunication Union (<http://www.itu.int/wsis/>).



Tunis phase: 16–18 November 2005

The objective of the second phase of the summit was to put Geneva’s Plan of Action into motion and to find solutions and reach agreements in the fields of Internet governance, financing mechanisms, and to follow-up and implement the Geneva and Tunis documents.

About 50 Heads of State and Vice-Presidents and 197 Ministers, Vice Ministers and Deputy Ministers from 174 countries as well as high-level representatives from international organizations, the private sector and civil society attended the Tunis Phase of WSIS and gave support to the Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society that were adopted on 18 November 2005. With even greater attendance than the Geneva phase, more than 19,000 participants attended the Tunis Summit and related events.

Preparatory Committee Process

Both phases of the Summit marked the completion of many months of consultations and negotiations among Member States, UN experts, the private sector, and non-governmental representatives, all of whom reviewed huge amounts of information and shared a broad spectrum of experiences in a wide range of issues related to the Information Society. These consultations and negotiations took place prior to the Summit itself and constituted what was called the Preparatory Committee Process or PrepCom for short.

Summit Organization

A High-Level Summit Organizing Committee (HLSOC) was established at the direction of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Its purpose was to

coordinate the efforts of the United Nations in the preparation, organization and holding of the two phases of the summit. The UN agency taking the leading role in the organization of the Summit was the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), based in Geneva (Switzerland). An Executive Secretariat (WSIS-ES) based at the ITU headquarters was established under the authority of the HLSOC to assist in the preparation of the Summit. Both host countries, Switzerland and Tunisia, also established their own Secretariats.

UNESCO and WSIS

UNESCO, with a mandate to promote the free exchange of ideas and knowledge, played a key role in the WSIS process. UNESCO's contribution greatly expanded the WSIS agenda to incorporate the ethical, legal and socio-cultural dimensions of the Information Society and helped shape the opportunities offered by the ICTs by making individuals the core of their approach to WSIS.

UNESCO encouraged broad participation by decision-makers, professional communities, representatives of civil society, bilateral and multilateral partners and the private sector in a debate on the conditions for the development of an information society for everyone.

UNESCO also supported several regional 'fora' around the world between 2002 and 2005 to address various aspects of the WSIS two phases.

Among them were:

UNESCO between the Two Phases of the World Summit on the Information Society
(An International Conference held in St. Petersburg, Russia, May 2005).

Role and Place of Media in the Information Society in Africa and the Arab States
(Marrakech, Morocco; November 2004).

Role of Science in the Information Society (RSIS)
(Geneva, European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN); August–September 2003).

UN ICT Task Force Global Forum on Internet Governance
(United Nations Headquarters, New York, USA; 25–26 March 2004).

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

A future Global Forum on Internet Governance will bring together leading actors and all relevant stakeholders, including Member States, civil society and the private sector, interested in Internet governance issues.

UNESCO – Central American WSIS Consultation
(Tegucigalpa, Honduras, October 2002).

The purpose was to discuss the political, social and educational challenges of the Information Society and to contribute to the preparation of the region for the World Summit on the Information Society.

UNESCO – Freedom of Expression in the Information Society
(UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France; November 2002).

UNESCO – ICT and Gender preparing for the WSIS
(Malaysia, May 2002).

UNESCO Asia conference for the preparation of the WSIS.

UNESCO – Latin American and Caribbean Challenges / Opportunities for the Information Society
(Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, September 2002).

UNESCO and the UN ICT Task Force Regional Consultation in preparation for the WSIS, with the support of the Government of Brazil

UNESCO/ICA – Consultation in preparation of the WSIS
(Beijing, China, May 2002).

Discussing the concerns of world archival community vis-à-vis the Summit.

WSIS – Pan-Arab Regional Conference
(Cairo, Egypt, June 2003).

Organized by MCIT, and under the auspices of the League of Arab States

WSIS – Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean

(Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; 26–29 January 2003)

Regional Preparation of the WSIS.

UNESCO – Asia Pacific Regional Seminar on the World Summit on the Information Society,
(December 2002).

An event of particular importance to the library community was the November 2003 UNESCO-supported international conference in Prague, Czech Republic, organized by the U.S. National Commission on Library and Information Sciences and the National Forum on Information Literacy which resulted in the Prague Declaration “Towards an Information Literate Society” [Prague Declaration 2003] and the follow-up meeting in November 2005 at Alexandria, Egypt that produced “Beacons of the Information Society: The Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning.” [Beacons 2005]

WSIS Phase One results: A common vision of the Information Society

The major achievement of Phase One was the adoption of a Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action which sought to define a common vision of a Global Information Society.

Most of the work of the Preparatory meetings was to negotiate draft language that could be readily adopted during the actual summit sessions. Some of the key words are excerpted below.

The Declaration of Principles begins:

We [...] declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life... (WSIS Declaration 2003, Paragraph 1)

The Declaration also addresses the issue of equity of access to information and the digital divide.

We are fully committed to turning this digital divide into a digital opportunity for all...

Other goals addressed by the Declaration and Action Plan include:

- Connectivity, access, capacity building, partnership and cooperation among different stakeholders;
- Financial mechanism: better utilization of existing financial mechanisms, possible future creation of a voluntary digital solidarity fund;
- Meeting the Millennium Development Goals, promote development and improve the quality of life.

... everyone can create, access, utilize, share information and knowledge

Central concepts include:

- Freedom of expression, enabling environment, content and language;
- Mutual respect for diverse cultures and traditions was also addressed.

Despite the endorsement of the Declaration and Action Plan, two contentious issues were left unresolved. By far the most debated unresolved issue in Phase One was Internet governance.

The UN Secretary General was asked to establish a working group on Internet governance in an open and inclusive process that

ensures a mechanism for the full and active participation of governments, the private sector and civil society from both developing and developed countries, involving relevant intergovernmental and international organizations and forums, to investigate and make proposals for action, as appropriate, on the governance of Internet by 2005. (Paragraph C6, 13 b) Plan of Action) (WSIS Declaration 2003)

Digital Solidarity Fund

The second issue left unresolved was a proposal, led by Senegal, to establish a Digital Solidarity Fund.

Creation of a task force was recommended at Phase One in the form of

a review – to be completed by the end of 2004 – of the adequacy of current financial mechanisms and the possibility to create a voluntary Digital Solidarity Fund will be conducted by a Task Force under the auspices of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and will be submitted for consideration to the second phase of this summit. (Paragraph D2 f) Plan of action) (WSIS Declaration 2003)

Libraries, museums, archives and WSIS

The global library community, led by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), coordinated the effort to add key concepts and words to the Declaration of Principles that specifically addresses and names libraries, museums and archives as central institutions in the global information society.

This work was done at the three Preparatory Meetings, at regional meetings in several countries and by lobbying country delegates during

and after the IFLA and Swiss Library Association sponsored pre-summit conference called *Libraries @ the Heart of the Information Society* held in Geneva 3–4 November 2003. (IFLA 2003)

The following highlights from the Declaration of Principles demonstrate the success of this concerted effort by the library, archive and museum communities to add pertinent language to WSIS documents. Key sections from the *Declaration of Principles* appear below with the relevant language in bold typeface for clarity.

A rich public domain is an essential element for the growth of the Information Society, creating multiple benefits such as an educated public, new jobs, innovation, business opportunities, and the advancement of sciences. Information in the public domain should be easily accessible to support the Information Society, and protected from misappropriation. Public institutions such as libraries and archives, museums, cultural collections and other community-based access points should be strengthened so as to promote the preservation of documentary records and free and equitable access to information. (Paragraph B3) Access to information and knowledge. Section 26) (WSIS Declaration 2003)

Content creators, publishers, and producers, as well as teachers, trainers, archivists, librarians and learners, should play an active role in promoting the Information Society, particularly in the Least Developed Countries. (Paragraph B4) Capacity building. Section 32) (WSIS Declaration 2003)

The Plan of Action also incorporated some of the language sought by IFLA and other library and museum organizations.

Plan of Action (WSIS Plan 2003)

B. Objectives, goals and targets
6.

- a. to connect villages with ICTs and establish community access points;
- b. to connect universities, colleges, secondary schools and primary schools with ICTs;
- c. to connect scientific and research centers with ICTs;
- d. to connect public libraries, cultural centers, museums, post offices and archives with ICTs;

C. Action Lines

C2. Information and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for the Information Society

c. In the context of national e-strategies, provide and improve ICT connectivity for all schools, universities, health

institutions, libraries, post offices, community centers, museums and other institutions accessible to the public, in line with the indicative targets.

d. Governments, and other stakeholders, should establish sustainable multi-purpose

community public access points, providing affordable or free-of-charge access for their citizens to the various communication resources, notably the Internet. These access points should, to the extent possible, have sufficient capacity to provide assistance to users, in libraries, educational institutions, public administrations, post offices or other public places, with special emphasis on rural and underserved areas, while respecting intellectual property rights (IPRs) and encouraging the use of information and sharing of knowledge.

C4. Capacity building
11.

k. Design specific training programmes in the use of ICTs in order to meet the educational needs of information professionals, such as archivists, librarians, museum professionals, scientists, teachers, journalists, postal workers and other relevant professional groups. Training of information professionals should focus not only on new methods and techniques for the development and provision of information and communication services, but also on relevant management skills to ensure the best use of technologies. Training of teachers should focus on the technical aspects of ICTs, on development of content, and on the potential possibilities and challenges of ICTs.

C8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content
23.

b. Develop national policies and laws to ensure that libraries, archives, museums and other cultural institutions can play their full role of content - including traditional knowledge — providers in the Information Society, more particularly by providing continued access to recorded information.

c. Support efforts to develop and use ICTs for the preservation of natural and, cultural heritage, keeping it accessible as a living part of today's culture. This includes developing systems for ensuring continued access to archived digital information and multimedia content in digital repositories, and support archives, cultural collections and libraries as the memory of humankind.

d. Develop and implement policies that preserve, affirm, respect and promote diversity of cultural expression and indigenous knowledge and traditions through the creation of varied information content and the use of different methods, including the digitization of the educational, scientific and cultural heritage.

e. Support local content development, translation and adaptation, digital archives, and diverse forms of digital and

traditional media by local authorities. These activities can also strengthen local and indigenous communities.

E. Follow-up and evaluation
28.

Develop and launch a website on best practices and success stories, based on a compilation of contributions from all stakeholders, in a concise, accessible and compelling format, following the internationally-recognized web accessibility standards. The website could be periodically updated and turned into a permanent experience-sharing exercise.

IFLA and WSIS Phase Two

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) was heavily involved in the WSIS process (see Figure 2). With the Egyptian government, it co-hosted a second pre-summit conference held November 10–11, 2005 at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria, Egypt.

The key document to emerge from the second pre-conference was a 'manifesto' on libraries (IFLA Alexandria Manifesto 2005). The pre-conference meeting and the manifesto enabled IFLA President Alex Byrne to present remarks at a plenary session at the World Summit in Tunis the following week (IFLA Libraries 2005).

The Alexandria Manifesto reads:

IFLA's Alexandria Manifesto on Libraries, the Information Society in Action

Libraries and information services contribute to the sound operation of the inclusive Information Society. They enable intellectual freedom by providing access to information, ideas and works of imagination in any medium and regardless of frontiers.

They help to safeguard democratic values and universal civil rights impartially and by opposing any form of censorship.

The unique role of libraries and information services is that they respond to the particular questions and needs of individuals. This complements the general transmission of knowledge by the media, for example, and makes libraries and information services vital to a democratic and open Information Society. Libraries are essential for a well informed citizenry and transparent governance, as well as for the take-up of e-government.

They also build capacity by promoting information literacy and providing support and training for effective use of information resources, including Information and Communication Technologies. This is especially critical

in promoting the development agenda because human resources are central to economic progress. In these ways libraries contribute significantly to addressing the digital divide and the information inequality that results from it. They help to make the Millennium Development Goals a reality, including reduction of poverty. They will do more with quite modest investments. The value of the return is at least 4–6 times the investment.

In pursuit of the goal of access to information by all peoples, IFLA supports balance and fairness in copyright. IFLA is also vitally concerned to promote multilingual content, cultural diversity and the special needs of Indigenous peoples and minorities.

IFLA and libraries and information services share the common vision of *an Information Society for all* adopted by the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva in December 2003. That vision promotes an inclusive society based on the fundamental right of human beings both to access and to express information without restriction and in which everyone will be able to create, access, use and share information and knowledge.

IFLA urges national, regional and local governments as well as international organisations to:

- invest in library and information services as vital elements in their Information Society strategies, policies and budgets;
- upgrade and extend existing library networks to obtain the greatest possible benefits for their citizens and communities;
- support unrestricted access to information and freedom of expression;
- promote open access to information and address structural and other barriers to access; and
- recognise the importance of information literacy and vigorously support strategies to create a literate and skilled populace which can advance and benefit from the global Information Society.

Adopted in Alexandria, Egypt, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, on 11 November 2005 (IFLA Alexandria Manifesto 2005).

WSIS Phase Two: Tunis, Tunisia, 16–18 November 2005

The Tunis Phase Two Summit produced two additional key documents: *The Tunis Commitment* (WSIS Tunis Commitment 2005) and *The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society*. (WSIS Tunis Agenda 2005)

The Tunis Commitment begins:

1. We, the representatives of the peoples of the world, have gathered in Tunis from 16–18 November 2005 for this second phase of the World Summit on the Informa-

Figure 2. IFLA's Web site for the WSIS process (<http://www.ifla.org/III/wsis.html>).

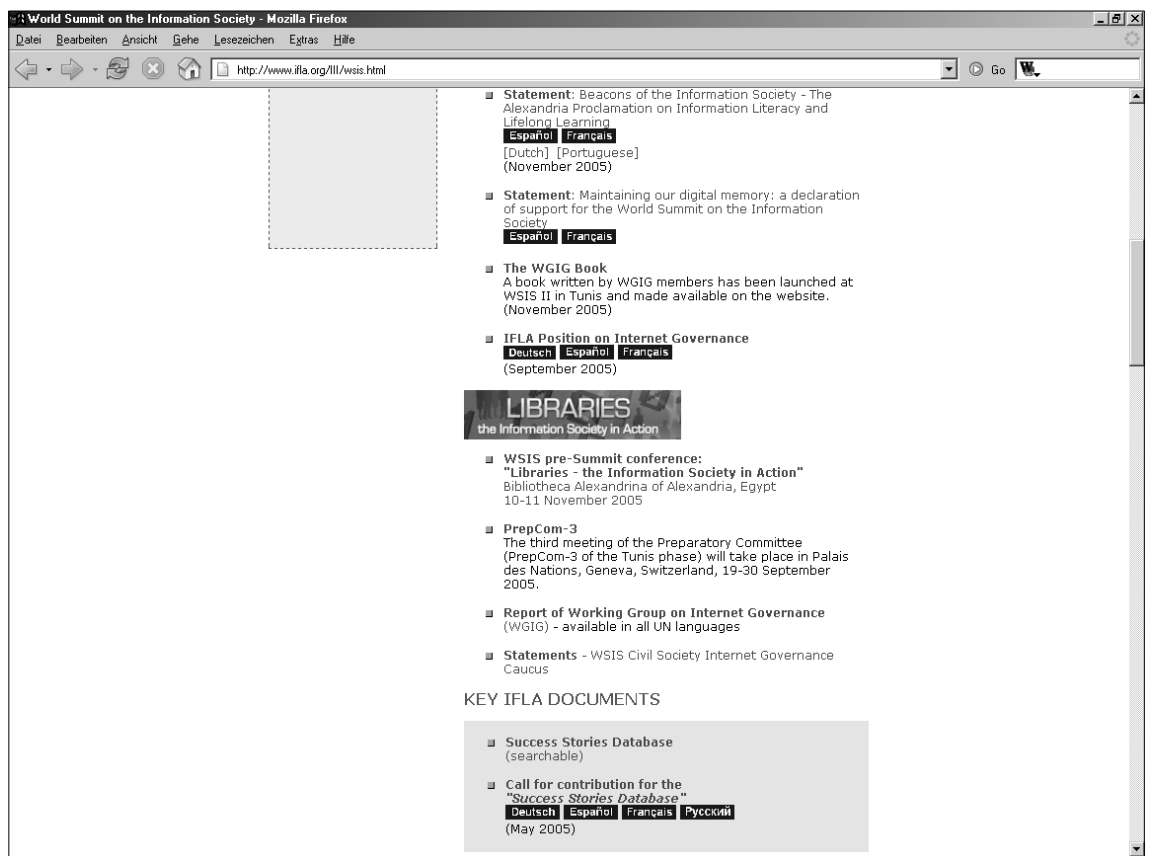
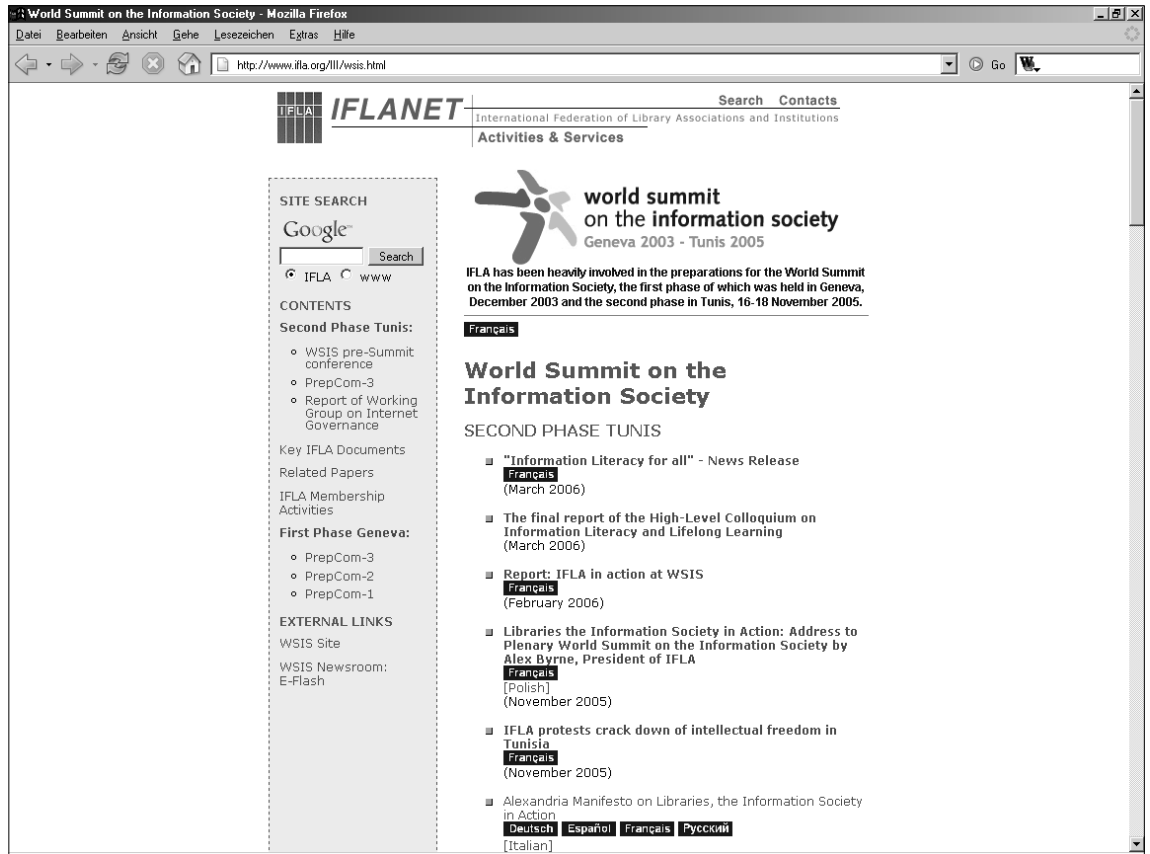


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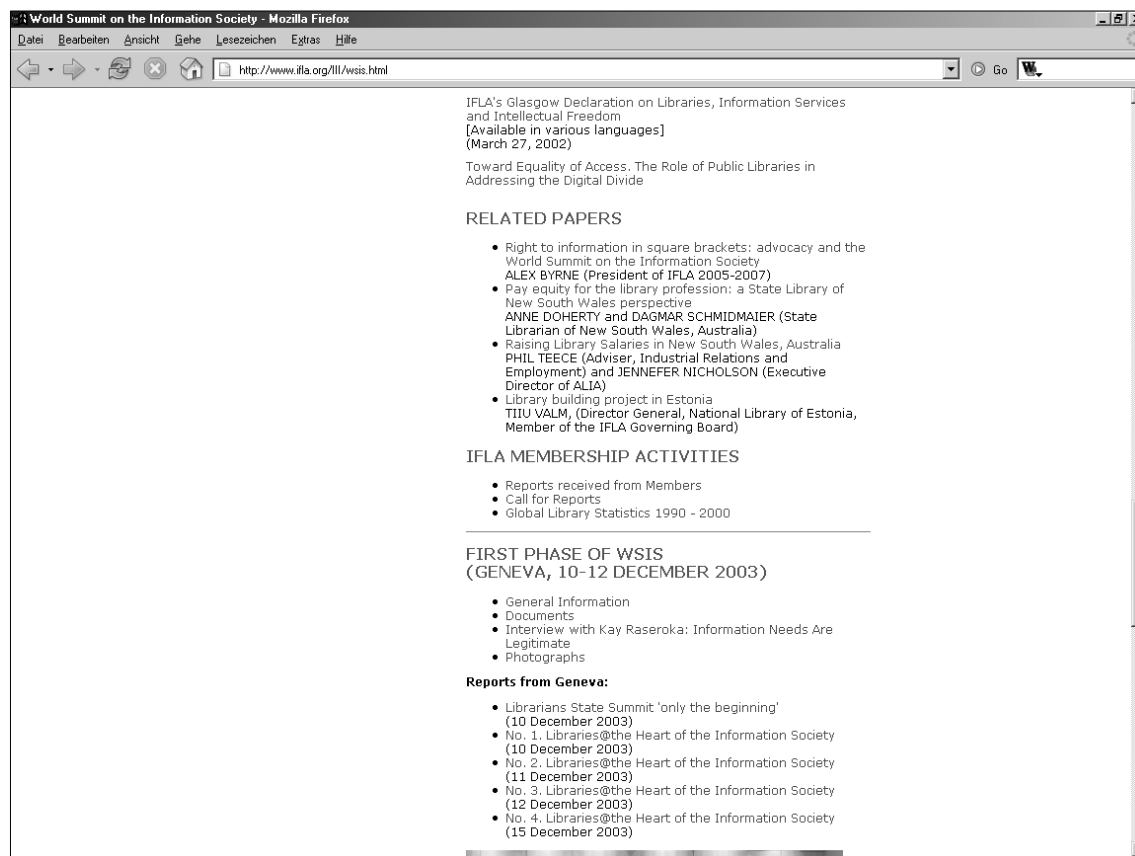
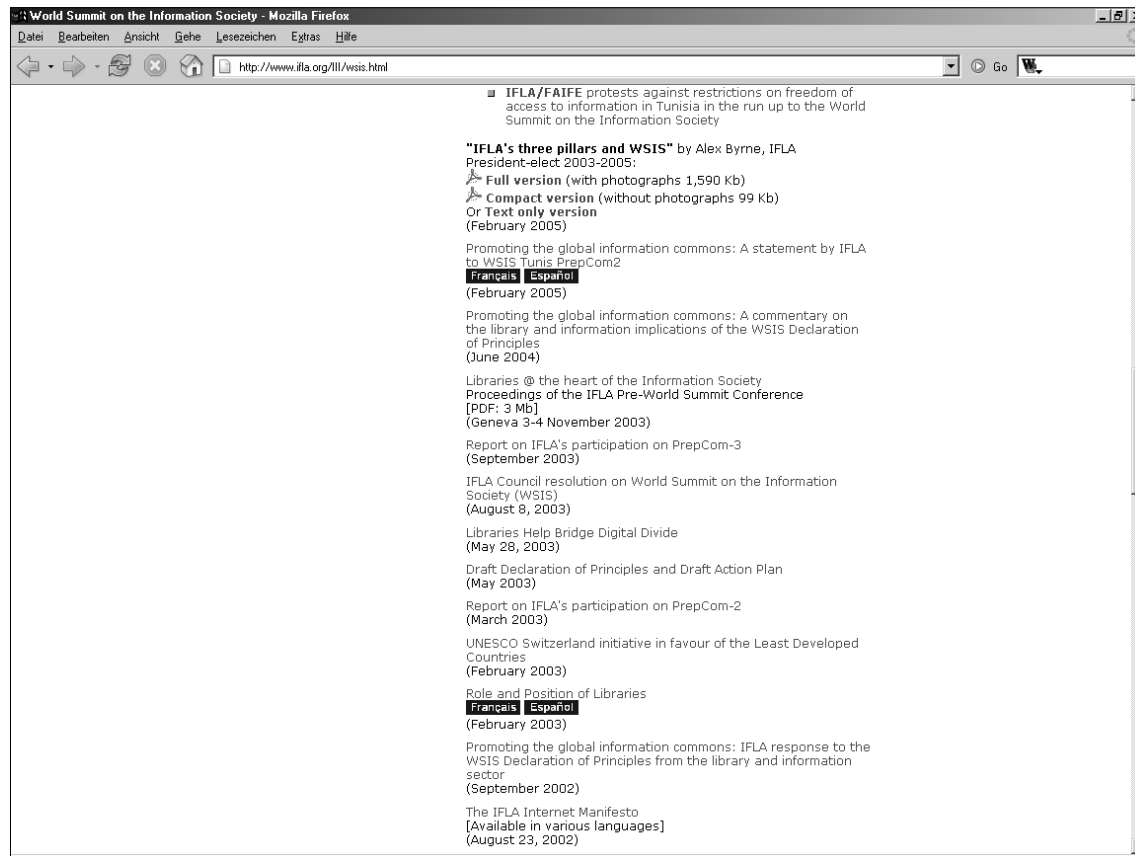
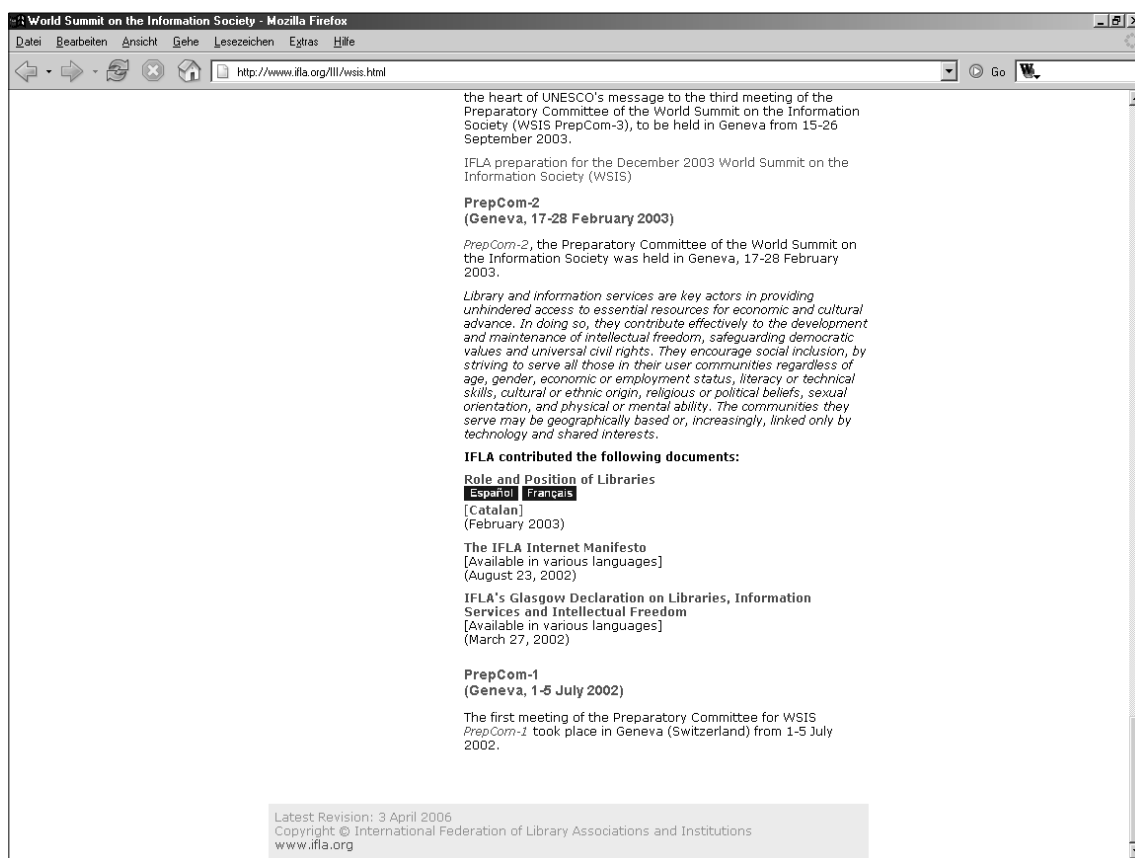
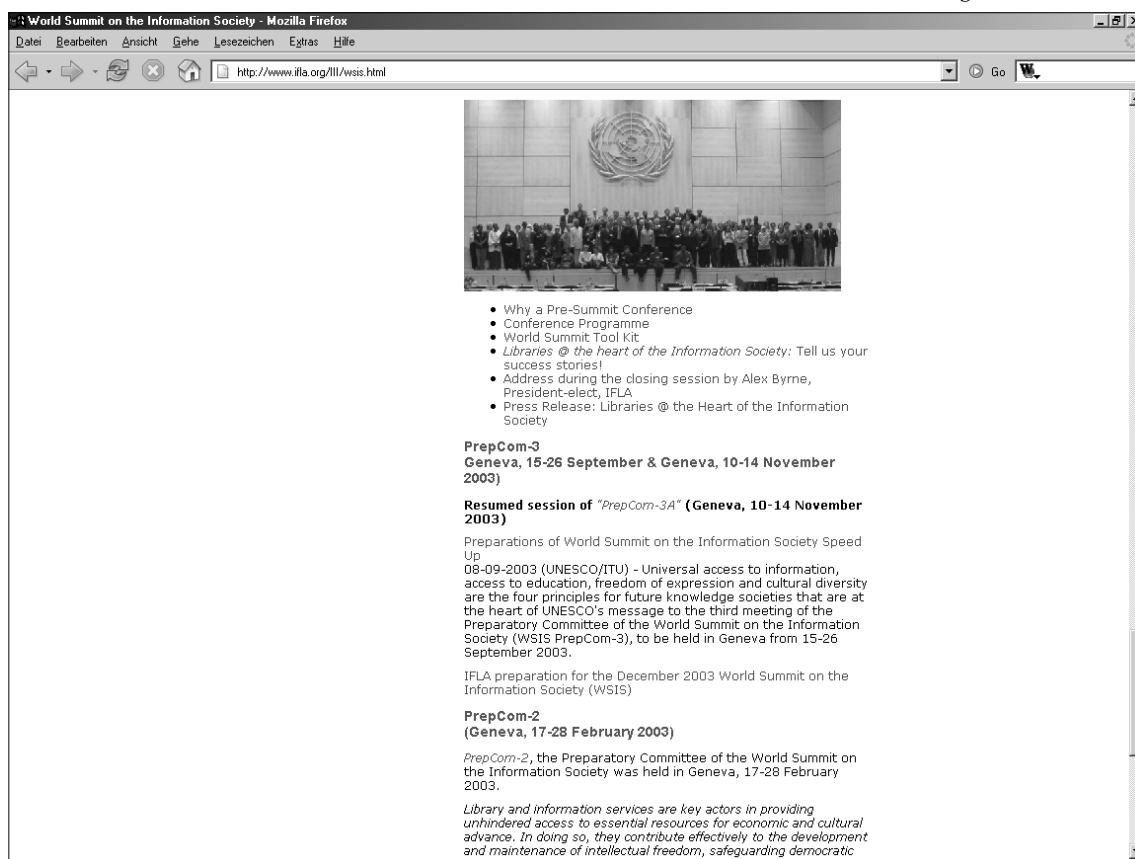


Figure 2. continued



tion Society (WSIS) to reiterate our unequivocal support for the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action adopted at the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva in December 2003.

2. We reaffirm our desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and multilateralism, and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, so that people everywhere can create, access, utilise and share information and knowledge, to achieve their full potential and to attain the internationally-agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals.

3. We reaffirm the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, as enshrined in the Vienna Declaration. We also reaffirm that democracy, sustainable development, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as good governance at all levels are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. We further resolve to strengthen respect for the rule of law in international as in national affairs.

And it continues to reiterate through a total of forty points most of the central points from the Geneva Phase One.

The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society

The following key points of the Tunis Agenda dealt with the two major unresolved issues from Phase One, financing the large agenda and Internet governance as well as implementation.

1. *We recognise* that it is now time to move from principles to action, considering the work already being done in implementing the Geneva Plan of Action and identifying those areas where progress has been made, is being made, or has not taken place.

2. *We reaffirm the commitments* made in Geneva and build on them in Tunis by focusing on financial mechanisms for bridging the digital divide, on Internet governance and related issues, as well as on implementation and follow-up of the Geneva and Tunis decisions.

28. *We welcome the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF)* established in Geneva as an innovative financial mechanism of a voluntary nature open to interested stakeholders with the objective of transforming the digital divide into digital opportunities for the developing world by focusing mainly on specific and urgent needs at the local level and seeking new voluntary sources of 'solidarity' finance. The DSF will complement existing mechanisms for funding the Information Society, which should continue to be fully utilised to fund the growth of new ICT infrastructure and services.

Internet Governance

By far, the most contentious issue in the two years between the WSIS phases was Internet governance. The amount of media attention devoted to this issue in the run-up to Phase Two probably surpassed all other coverage of WSIS from 2003 forward.

Despite the July 2005 report (WGIG 2005) from the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), established in early 2004, discussions and negotiations continued right up to the opening of the Tunis phase on November 16, 2005.

The central issue was the perceived dominance of the United States in the management of the Internet. The California-based Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), in particular, was singled out along with its Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Commerce Department, which established ICANN in 1993.

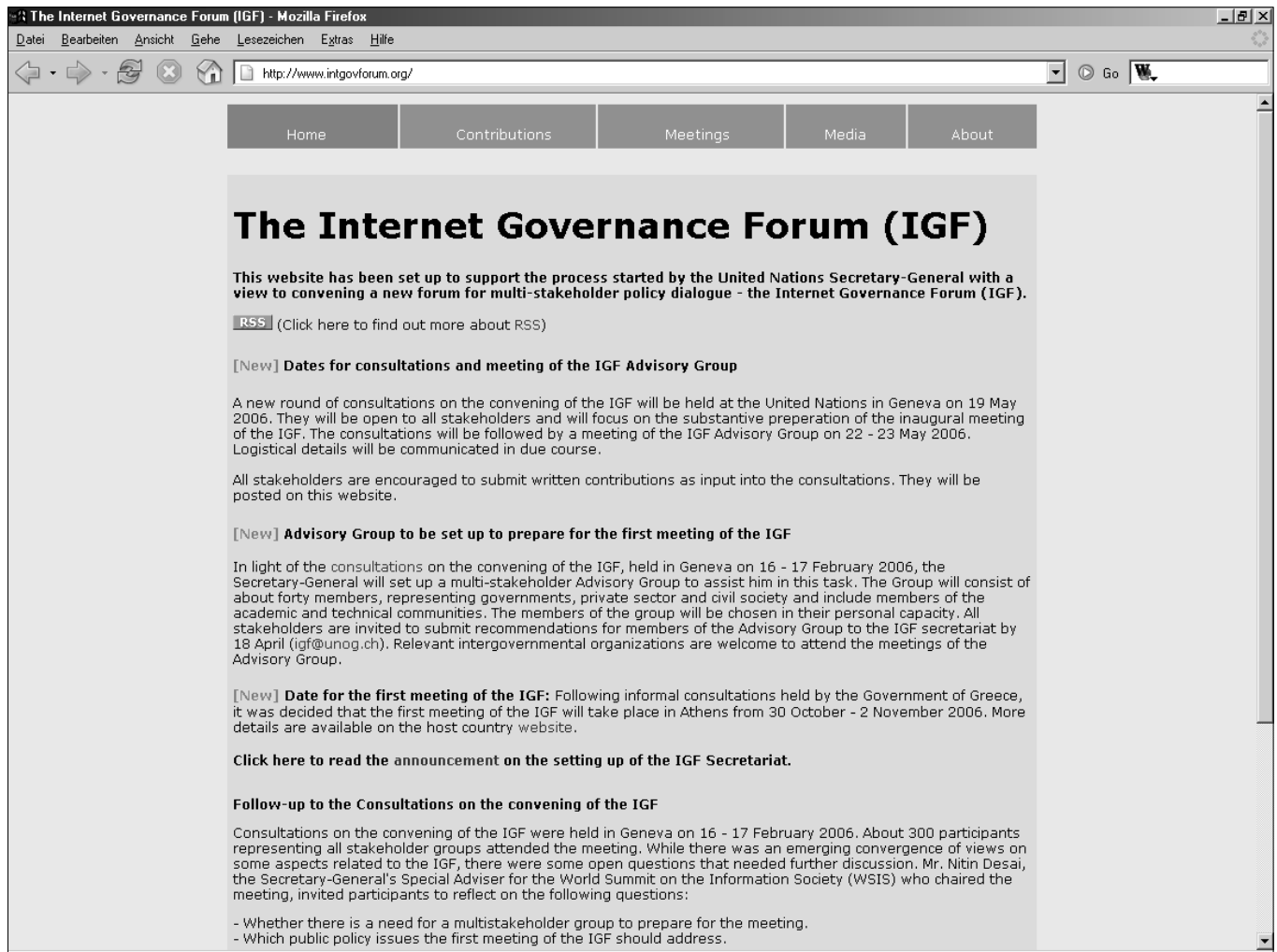
Iran, China and Cuba led the challenge to U.S. dominance with some support for broader participation by the UN and other nations emerging in October 2005 from the European Union.

In the end, the UN Secretary-General was asked to establish, through an open and inclusive process, a new 'forum' for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue called the *Internet Governance Forum (IGF)* (IGF 2006). See Figure 3 for a view of its Web site. As proposed, the Forum has an advisory role but no policy authority. In early March 2006, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan began the process of creating a forum for a more inclusive dialogue on Internet policy. The first meeting of this forum will be in Athens later in 2006.

The mandate set by the UN Secretary General for the Forum is to (Mandate 2005):

- Discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet;
- Facilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different crosscutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body;
- Interface with appropriate inter-governmental organisations and other institutions on matters under their purview;
- Facilitate the exchange of information and best practices, and in this regard make full use of the expertise of the academic, scientific and technical communities;

Figure 3. Web site developed for the Internet Governance Forum (<http://www.intforum.org>).



- Advise all stakeholders in proposing ways and means to accelerate the availability and affordability of the Internet in the developing world;
 - Strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and/or future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly those from developing countries;
 - Identify emerging issues, bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and, where appropriate, make recommendations;
 - Contribute to capacity building for Internet governance in developing countries, drawing fully on local sources of knowledge and expertise;
 - Promote and assess, on an ongoing basis, the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet governance processes;
 - Discuss, *inter alia*, issues relating to critical Internet resources;
 - Help to find solutions to the issues arising from the use and misuse of the Internet, of particular concern to everyday users;
 - Publish its proceedings.
- Many observers believe that the Tunis compromise both postpones and continues the debate on Internet governance and that some form of broader participation will emerge over time.
- In the United States, the Internet governance debate cuts along political and economic lines – some are convinced that United Nations, through the ITU and with the support of several nations, seeks Internet dominance. Others believe the status quo has worked and is working effective and that no substantive change is needed.
- For libraries, the question of Internet governance is also tied to whether there might eventually

be a library top-level domain (TLD), like there is for museums. Currently, ICANN's prohibitive non-refundable \$45,000 application submission fee precludes most public agencies from applying. A change in governance might mean that a special track for non-profits could be embraced that would allow for a greatly reduced application fee. A TLD for libraries would allow the development of specialized Internet services for libraries. All libraries would have .library domain names in addition to their present domain names. For example, a centralized server could answer questions like "Where is the closest public library?" by linking a user with the Web sites for nearby public libraries.

Below are some highlights from the Tunis Agenda on the issue of Internet governance (WSIS Tunis Agenda 2005):

Tunis Agenda paragraph 29. We reaffirm the principles enunciated in the Geneva phase of the WSIS, in December 2003, that the Internet has evolved into a global facility available to the public and its governance should constitute a core issue of the Information Society agenda. The international management of the Internet should be multilateral, transparent and democratic, with the full involvement of governments, the private sector, civil society and international organisations. It should ensure an equitable distribution of resources, facilitate access for all and ensure a stable and secure functioning of the Internet, taking into account multilingualism.

30. We acknowledge that the Internet, a central element of the infrastructure of the Information Society, has evolved from a research and academic facility into a global facility available to the public.

31. We recognise that Internet governance, carried out according to the Geneva principles, is an essential element for a people-centred, inclusive, development oriented and non-discriminatory Information Society. Furthermore, we commit ourselves to the stability and security of the Internet as a global facility and to ensuring the requisite legitimacy of its governance, based on the full participation of all stakeholders, from both developed and developing countries, within their respective roles and responsibilities.

34. A working definition of Internet governance is the development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.

Other key points on Internet governance matters are:

- Policy authority for Internet-related public policy issues is the sovereign right of States. They have rights and responsibilities for international Internet-related public policy issues;
- The private sector has had, and should continue to have, an important role in the development of the Internet, both in the technical and economic fields;
- Civil society has also played an important role on Internet matters, especially at community level, and should continue to play such a role;
- Paragraph 42. We reaffirm our commitment to the freedom to seek, receive, impart and use information, in particular, for the creation, accumulation and dissemination of knowledge. We affirm that measures undertaken to ensure Internet stability and security, to fight cyber-crime and to counter spam, must protect and respect the provisions for privacy and freedom of expression as contained in the relevant parts of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Declaration of Principles.

The key role of UNESCO in the Tunis Phase

UNESCO was an active participant in the Tunis phase of the World Summit as well, organizing three events and an exhibition promoting the concept of building "knowledge societies":

- A High-Level Round Table on "Shaping the Future through Knowledge". Drawing on the thematic consultations of the months before the Summit and the "UNESCO World Report 2005: Towards Knowledge Societies," the Round Table was a political and strategies event, highlighting key ideas and principles which UNESCO seeks to promote to help increase people's access to and use of information and knowledge for human development.
- A Round Table on the "Role of UNESCO in the Construction of Knowledge Societies through the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme." The event reviewed national, regional and world experiences in implementing UNESCO Chairs and networks in ICT and considered how this UNESCO mechanism can help to bridge existing information and knowledge gaps.
- A Workshop on "ICT and Persons with Disabilities" which examined policies to promote accessibility and inclusion in the digital world, especially in developing countries, and given the participatory and inclusive goals of knowledge societies, at how access to cyberspace for people with disabilities can be enhanced.
- An exhibition, which has a virtual version on the UNESCO website, showed how UNESCO is contributing to the implementation of the WSIS Action Plan and it was a space for meeting colleagues and friends and for exchanging ideas and experiences on how to build knowledge societies.

Several UNESCO publications also addressed various aspects of the Information Society agenda: "Measuring Linguistic Diversity on the Internet," "Partnerships in Development Practice: Evidence from multi-stakeholder ICT4D partnership practice in Africa," and, of course, "UNESCO World Report 2005: Towards Knowledge Societies."

Implementation and follow-up

A challenge for all U.N. summits is to implement the usually well-written and always well-intended principles laid out for the issues addressed at the meetings. The other even larger challenge, of course, is the non-binding nature of the summit process itself.

In the case of both WSIS phases, a real attempt was made to create Action Plans, and to mount a "stocktaking" (or success stories) searchable database of achievements to be built over time (see <http://www.itu.int/wsis/stocktaking/index.html>).

Some of words issuing from the Tunis Agenda (2005) are:

83. Building an inclusive development-oriented Information Society will require unremitting multi-stakeholder effort. *We thus commit ourselves* to remain fully engaged – nationally, regionally and internationally – to ensure sustainable implementation and follow-up of the outcomes and commitments reached during the WSIS process and its Geneva and Tunis phases of the Summit. Taking into account the multi-faceted nature of building the Information Society, effective cooperation among governments, private sector, civil society and the United Nations and other international organisations, according to their different roles and responsibilities and leveraging on their expertise, is essential.

90. *We reaffirm our commitment* to providing equitable access to information and knowledge for all, recognising the role of ICTs for economic growth and development. *We are committed* to working towards achieving the indicative targets, set out in the Geneva Plan of Action, that serve as global references for improving connectivity and universal, ubiquitous, equitable, non-discriminatory and affordable access to, and use of ICTs, considering different national circumstances, to be achieved by 2015, and to using ICTs, as a tool to achieve the internationally-agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals, by:

mainstreaming and aligning national e-strategies, across local, national, and regional action plans, as appropriate and in accordance with local and national development priorities, with in-built time-bound measures;

developing and implementing enabling policies that reflect national realities and that promote a supportive international environment, foreign direct investment as well as the mobilisation of domestic resources, in order to promote and foster entrepreneurship, particularly Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), taking into account the relevant market and cultural contexts. These policies should be reflected in a transparent, equitable regulatory framework to create a competitive environment to support these goals and strengthen economic growth;

building ICT capacity for all and confidence in the use of ICTs by all -- including youth, older persons, women, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and remote and rural communities -- through the improvement and delivery of relevant education and training programmes and systems including lifelong and distance learning;

implementing effective training and education, particularly in ICT science and technology, that motivates and promotes participation and active involvement of girls and women in the decision-making process of building the Information Society;

supporting educational, scientific, and cultural institutions, including libraries, archives and museums, in their role of developing, providing equitable, open and affordable access to, and preserving diverse and varied content, including in digital form, to support informal and formal education, research and innovation; and in particular supporting libraries in their public service role of providing free and equitable access to information and of improving ICT literacy and community connectivity, particularly in underserved communities;

promoting the use of traditional and new media in order to foster universal access to information, culture and knowledge for all people, especially vulnerable populations and populations in developing countries and using, *inter alia*, radio and television as educational and learning tools;

Reaffirming the independence, pluralism and diversity of media, and freedom of information including through, as appropriate, the development of domestic legislation, *we reiterate* our call for the responsible use and treatment of information by the media in accordance with the highest ethical and professional standards. *We reaffirm* the necessity of reducing international imbalances affecting the media, particularly as regards infrastructure, technical resources and the development of human skills. These reaffirmations are made with reference to Geneva Declaration of Principles paragraphs 55 to 59.

Several UN agencies and other inter-governmental organizations have been charged to facilitate activities among different stakeholders, including civil society and the private business sector, to help national governments in their implementation efforts.

Paragraph 120 discusses this:

“The sharing of information related to the implementation of WSIS outcomes is an important element of evaluation. We note with appreciation the *Report on the Stocktaking of WSIS-related activities*, which will serve as one of the valuable tools for assisting with the follow-up, beyond the conclusion of the Tunis Phase of the Summit, as well as the “*Golden Book*” of initiatives launched during the Tunis phase. We encourage all WSIS stakeholders to continue to contribute information on their activities to the public WSIS stocktaking database [see <http://www.itu.int/wsis/stocktaking/index.html>] maintained by ITU. In this regard, we invite all countries to gather information at the national level with the involvement of all stakeholders, to contribute to the stocktaking.”

The Tunis Agenda also calls on the UN General Assembly to declare 17 May as *World Information Society Day* to raise awareness, on an annual basis, of the importance of the global internet, the issues dealt with in the Summit process, particularly the possibilities that the use of ICTs have for societies and economies and call attention to ways to bridge the global digital divide.

An example of a WSIS-inspired initiative by the private sector and an NGO demonstrated at the Tunis summit is the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) established in 2005 to lead the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s (MIT) Media Laboratory’s project to build \$100 laptop computers for school-children worldwide, particularly in emerging and developing countries: The Linux software vendor Red Hat has agreed to become a founding corporate partner in MIT’s Nicholas Negroponte-led project.

Such projects, together with significant government-sponsored and funded initiatives offer the possibility that the World Summit on the Information Society will meet at least some of its ambitious action agenda. [1]

Some closing thoughts: lessons learned by libraries, museums, and archives through the WSIS process

Throughout the entire period, it was clear that the library, museum and archives communities were consistently evaluating and recasting their strategies to articulate the value of their organizations to the Global Information Society in a way that would resonate with the policy makers, document drafters and other representatives in the WSIS pro-

cess. The following lists some of the most important lesson learned.

- The library community stressed that a global network of libraries in thousands of communities already exists so there is no need to reinvent them. The community then suggested using them and funding them at higher levels.
- Many countries worked with the official delegates to WSIS Phase One and Two to be sure library, museum and archives positions were clearly articulated and understood. They were very good advocates. The library and culture community broke new ground in many countries.
- Because of UN protocols used in debates, only representatives from member states are allowed to participate in discussions and debates. Thus, IFLA and UNESCO were only permitted a single statement on the floor of each of the two phases and relied on lobbying outside the formal meeting to gain critical support for their positions.
- The library community worked very hard to get the words *libraries, librarians, museums and archives* into the Declaration of Principles and Action Plan – in this case, words really do matter.
- The library community emphasized the value of telling library ‘success stories’ to the larger world community by building a robust, Web-based repository of ideas that work locally, nationally and globally.

Notes

1. The following two websites contain the bulk of documents cited above; both continue to monitor WSIS activities and may add content over time: <http://www.ifla.org> and <http://www.itu.int/wsis/>

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